

Hamlet: Prince of Denmark
Semester and Year: Spring 2015
Credits: 3
Disciplines: Literature. Theater Studies.
Instructor name: Chris Fee

Description of course

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has captivated the popular imagination for more than four centuries, and continues to inflame passions and to engender productions and adaptations to this very day. In this course we will follow in the footsteps of this most famous Prince of Denmark. We pick up *Hamlet's* trail in the misty past of Danish legendary history and end in modern Helsingør, Shakespeare's Elsinore, where we will stage our own dramatic reading of Shakespeare's play in the very shadow of Kronborg Slot, forever more known to the popular mind as "Hamlet's Castle."

Course Objectives

By the end of this course you will know one of the great classics of English literature very well indeed; moreover, you will have a good grounding in its sources, and you will be able to discuss why "the Dane abides," which is to say that you will be able to articulate some compelling reasons why *Hamlet* continues to fixate modern readers and audiences. More to the point in a Danish context, you will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* and its medieval Danish sources, and you will be able to comment eloquently and from personal lived experience concerning the function of setting in the play. Finally, you will have a solid understanding of the relationship between literary studies and production values in the staging of Shakespearean drama.

Course Format

We will explore conflicting theories concerning the origin and development of *Hamlet*, its analogues, and its source materials, examine and discuss reasons for the play's abiding appeal, discuss issues of text and performance, and compare the relative merits of "good literature" and "good drama." We will read a number of related materials, both primary and secondary, and we will view video performances of several productions. This course combines vibrant class discussion—punctuated and propelled by carefully-chosen lines of Socratic questioning—with regular close readings and dramatic renderings of key scenes from the play in class, independent research, a great deal of collaborative work, and the staging of our own dramatic reading of *Hamlet* in Helsingør.

Field studies: A production of a Shakespearean play in Copenhagen (if at all possible); an all-day trip to Kronborg Slot ("Hamlet's Castle," Helsingør) for a tour and a dramatic reading of the play

Course Requirements

This syllabus is subject to change.

You are expected to be present, prepared, and ready to participate in each and every class period. Some find participating in class discussions to be fun and easy, while others find it threatening and uncomfortable. You need **not** be a big talker to do well in this class (although it usually doesn't hurt!), but you **do** need to be prepared to answer an occasional question, articulate intelligent confusion, or voice the odd query (about the subject matter at hand rather than, say, grading procedures!). This class also requires a great deal of group work and the collaborative class activity of putting on a play; full participation in all required activities is presupposed. Anything less is unfair to your classmates, the audience, and the play. The midterm exam will provide a good measure of your grasp of the academic material, while the short historical/legendary background and dramaturgical essays will illustrate that you understand from whence in the misty dawn of Denmark the roots of this play sprang, as well as what it might mean to a contemporary audience, especially to an audience of Danes and Americans in Denmark. Taking Hamlet at his word, in this class we believe that ultimately, "the play's the thing" (Act II, scene ii). Thus, in lieu of a final exam, all members of the class will participate in our dramatic reading in Helsingør, which will serve as an experiential capstone to the course. This final activity will function as a memorable lab experience through which we will test and measure our academic understanding of the play, its medieval sources, and its modern significance.

Grade Components

Daily Preparation & Participation:	20%
Historical/Legendary Background Essay:	20%
Dramaturgical Essay:	20%
Midterm Exam:	20%
"The play's the thing...." Participation in Final Production:	20%

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